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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of sexual abuse by male batterers has been estimated to be between 34% and 59%, although there are few studies examining the effects of this sexual abuse on the female victims. Further, the relationship between other forms of abuse and sexual abuse by a battering partner has not been systematically examined. The purpose of this study was to describe the effects of sexual abuse by a battering partner on a sample of female victims and to examine the relationship between abuse occurring within and outside the relationship. Participants in the study were battered women (N=320) from a specialized family violence program. Participants completed an assessment protocol at intake that included the Keane-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Subscale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Impact of Event Scale, and a structured clinical interview which identified them as battered women. The base rate of sexual abuse by a battering partner in the sample was 36.8%. No significant relationship was found when rates of childhood sexual abuse and other sexual assault were compared to rates of sexual abuse by the batterer. These results appear to suggest that the cumulative effects of multiple forms of abuse exacerbate the effects of battering alone. (ABL)

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The Effects Of Sexual Abuse On Women In Battering Relationships

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Introduction

Although the prevalence of sexual abuse by male batterers has been estimated to be between 34% and 59% (Shields, Resick, & Hannecke, 1990; Walker, 1984), there are few studies examining the effects of this sexual abuse on the female victims (Walker, 1984). Further, the relationship between other forms of abuse and sexual abuse by a battering partner has not been systematically examined. The purpose of the present study is to describe the effects of sexual abuse by a battering partner on a sample of female victims and to examine the relationship between abuse occurring within and outside the relationship.

Method

Subjects

Participants in the present study were 320 battered women from a specialized family violence program. Most of the subjects were Anglo, married, and living with a partner. The subjects' mean age was 34 years (SD = 10).

Procedure

Subjects were asked to complete a standard

assessment protocol at intake that included the Keane-PTSD Subscale of the MMPI (Keane, Fairbank, & Malloy, 1985), the Impact of Event Scale (IES; Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979), and a structured clinical interview which identified them as battered women. Physical and sexual abuse histories were also obtained during this interview.

The frequencies of childhood physical/sexual abuse and sexual assault among battered women who were or were not sexually abused by their partners were compared using a series of chi-square analyses with Yates correction for continuity. Four abuse groups were constructed based on the occurrence/non-occurrence of childhood physical abuse and sexual abuse by a battering partner. Comparison of Keane PTSD and IES subscale scores for Groups 1-4 were performed using a oneway ANOVA, with Scheffe post-hoc comparisons.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with findings reported above, the base rate of sexual abuse by a battering partner in the sample was 36.8% (n=109). Forty-five percent of these women reported childhood physical abuse as compared to

a base rate of 31.6% for women not reporting sexual abuse by their partner ($X^2 = 4.78$, $p < .05$). No significant relationship was found when rates of childhood sexual abuse and other sexual assault were compared to rates of sexual abuse by the batterer.

Comparison of the four abuse groups on the Keane-PTSD and IES revealed varying levels of current distress (F [3,128] = 4.85, $p < .005$). Battered women with a positive history of sexual abuse and childhood physical abuse ($X = 27.6$, $SD = 9.7$) had significantly higher mean scores on the Keane-PTSD scale than both the non-sexually abused group ($X = 19.7$, $SD = 7.6$) and women with a history of childhood physical abuse ($X = 20.1$, $SD = 8.2$).

Comparison of the four groups on the Intrusion and Avoidance Subscales of the IES also revealed significant differences (Intrusion: F [3,122] = 9.79, $p < .0001$; Avoidance: F [3,121] = 8.9, $p < .0001$). Battered women with a history of both partner-related sexual abuse and childhood physical abuse had higher Intrusion and Avoidance scores (Intrusion: $X = 22.2$, $SD = 8.7$: Avoidance: $X = 26.7$, $SD = 9.5$) than women with

only a history of child abuse (Intrusion: X = 14.2 , SD = 11.4; Avoidance: X = 15.8, SD = 12.0) and non-sexually abused women (Intrusion: X = 11.4, SD = 9.3: Avoidance: X = 14.0, SD = 10.4). Also, sexually abused battered women had higher IES-Intrusion scores (X = 20.9, SD = 9.1) than those battered women not reporting other forms of abuse (X = 11.4, SD = 9.3).

These results appear to suggest that the cumulative effects of multiple forms of abuse exacerbate the effects of battering alone. These results will be explored in terms of current literature and their implications for assessment and treatment of battered women.